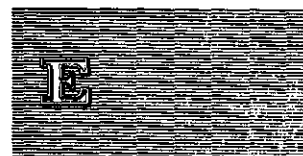


# ***UNITED NATIONS***

## **ECONOMIC**

## **AND**

## **SOCIAL COUNCIL**



Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CEPAL/G.1271  
E/CEPAL/SES.20/G.9  
19 January 1984

ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

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E C L A

Economic Commission for Latin America

URBANIZATION, URBAN GROWTH AND SETTLEMENT CONCENTRATION  
IN LATIN AMERICA. A GENERAL OVERVIEW

83-12-2255



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## SUMMARY

The definition of policies of land regulation and improvement and control of the habitat, together with the planning of human settlements, calls for a profound analysis of the relations between the processes associated with population distribution and the trends of economic development. In this connection particular attention needs to be given in the region to urbanization, accelerated urban growth and, above all, metropolitan concentration.

In this paper, after stressing the speediness of the aforesaid processes and analysing their most important causes and effects in the economic, social, political and demographic fields, we refer to some gaps in the study of these causes and effects. An account is also given of the main substantive currents which have supported the formulation of policies in this field in the past.

There follows an outline of some of the demo-spatial and socioeconomic features of urbanization in Latin America including a reference to their very significant trends towards population concentration and to their relations with certain changes in the agrarian structures and industrialization; attention is also given to the patterns of social stratification and to the forms of organization of urban space.

Although it is recognized that there is a dearth of adequate knowledge on the subject, it is contended here that many problems relating to environmental deterioration and the failure to satisfy the basic needs of the urban population are due to the conditions pertaining to the development styles predominant in the region rather than to the size or growth rate of the cities.

The paper concludes with some critical notes on the theses of the "optimum size" of the urban centres and the "spatially balanced development" of the urban systems, which have been the basis of a number of policy proposals and public measures which have really been no more than palliatives of symptoms reflecting grave structural situations that have not been touched.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most notable features of human settlement in Latin America is the marked trend towards urbanization and population concentration and to the establishment of settlement systems predominantly urban. It is, of course, a process deeply rooted in the past which has been evolving over a long period. Nevertheless, the ways in which it has recently developed invest it with special characteristics. One of these is the increased speed with which large social sectors are incorporated into new forms of production, consumption and administration; another is the formation of large cities, metropolitan areas and urban regions, which predominate within the national urban systems.

There is abundant empirical information on the acceleration of social urbanization on a global scale and on the rise of huge urban conglomerations. In various studies conducted by the United Nations it is shown that as recently as in 1850 barely 4.3% of the world population lived in cities of 20 000 or more inhabitants; a century later, in 1950, the inhabitants of those cities represented a fifth of the population of the world, and in 1970, one of every four inhabitants of the earth lived in cities of that size. Moreover, whereas in 1850 there were only three cities with a million or more inhabitants (London, Pekin and Paris), in 1950 there were 77 cities of that size and in 1970 the figure had reached 160. Projections indicate that in the year 2000 there will be some 250 of these cities, 90 of which will have over four million inhabitants and two-thirds of these will be in less developed regions.<sup>1/</sup>

From the foregoing figures it can be seen that urbanization has been accelerating and has led to the rise of cities of considerable dimensions. If this rate of growth persists, the urban areas will continue to multiply and increase. Even though there are signs of a decline in the relative growth of the major cities in relation to that of the medium-sized, the process of urbanization has given rise to new spatial forms in which the old boundaries of the cities lose their contours to give place to huge conglomerations or megalopolises of several million inhabitants. It does not seem an exaggeration to estimate that towards the year 2000 there may be some ten conurbations, or urbanized regions, each with over 30 million inhabitants.

Although the dimensions of the urbanizing process have given rise to increasing concern, its essential determinants and effects do not appear to have been sufficiently analysed. Even though it is generally recognized that the rapid demographic growth, the changes in the agrarian and industrial structures, the forms of external relations of the national societies and the technological innovations - particularly in respect of transport, communications and physical infrastructures - go hand-in-hand with urbanization, the knowledge that exists on its more global interrelations with development continues to be weak. The study of the repercussions of this process on the dynamics and structure of the population, the forms and scales of production, the styles and patterns of distribution and consumption, the transformations occurring in social relations,

the modes of politico-institutional organization and even on certain cultural and ideological traditions, constitutes a very formidable challenge.

Many of the studies on urbanization have consisted in the elaboration of diagnoses of situations regarded as critical and frequently denounced in dramatic terms. The measures arising out of these studies have therefore had a markedly corrective aim, oriented towards the halting or redirecting of everything identified as an undesirable trend. Many of the efforts made to alter these trends can be fairly described as far from successful. The omission of the causal factors has led in practice to the application of partial remedies which, being only palliatives of the symptoms, have borne fruit only occasionally and for fairly short periods.

From another standpoint, many studies on urbanization conceive this process, and its concrete expression -the city- as a historical reality which has been essential for the attainment of goals and objectives of social change and development and which constitutes a basic ecological substratum for the evolution of social life and economic activities. The analyses made from this perspective, however, have not in general contributed to the identification of key variables that might become policy objectives.

There can be no doubt that the cities have played a leading role in the generation and transmission of innovations, and have served to create conditions favouring the diversification of economic structures -including access to scientific and technical knowledge, availability of physical endowments, proximity to the market- which have resulted in the emergence of economies of scale, complementation and agglomeration, all of which can be interpreted as a set of requisites necessary for economic growth. Similarly, the cities have contributed to the structuring of patterns of social interaction which imply a growing specification of roles, a complex interlocking of institutions, and expansion of communication mechanisms and the establishment of multiple channels of mobility, all factors conditioning the continuous changes in social relations which represent a potential of participation and democratization in the choice of options for national policy and articulation.

Of course, many of the aspects mentioned regarding the role of urbanization in the promotion of social change and possibly of development depend on the historical setting in which it is taking place. Thus, in the experience of the less developed regions, this process has evolved in a context governed by a series of inadequacies in the production of goods and services, reproducing situations of social inequality reflected in a generally regressive income distribution. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the cities, and especially the larger urban concentrations, present features of deterioration and unsatisfied demands which would require enormous investments to remedy, diverting scarce resources for purposes not directly productive. From this angle the city might be regarded as an obstacle to economic and social development. It must be remembered, however, that the expression of the basic needs

of the population and the conflicts created by its non-satisfaction are not a product of urbanization, nor even of its acceleration, neither are they concomitants of great human concentrations. In effect, what is happening is that these agglomerations bring to the fore the inequalities inherent in the socioeconomic structures while at the same time providing means to externalize the pressures to reform them. A fundamental problem consists in channelling these conflictive situations so as to discover ways to settle them.

It is generally maintained that investment resources are a prerequisite for the efficient provision of urban services (infrastructures, housing, education, health, recreation, trade, security, administration) and that these are available in terms of the degree of development of a society. Indeed it seems undeniable that the material situation of the cities is, fundamentally, an indication of the degree as well as of the style of development of a society and that therefore, in the conditions prevailing, it is not possible to provide full basic urban services in the less developed countries; the material base of the human settlements as a whole is a direct reflection of the type of development prevailing. The spatial configuration of a particular city, however, whatever the style of development predominating, exhibits qualitative and quantitative situations which depend on the social position of the inhabitants of the different districts. Hence, in relative terms, even in the more developed countries the unprivileged social sectors will be subject to local deficiencies and deterioration.

In brief, it can be said that there is a relationship between development and urbanization of a kind which makes the latter both consequence and requisite of the former. If development is understood as a set of changes redounding in the sustained increase of production of goods and services and per capita income -with a transfer of the pivot of activity from the primary sector to industry and services- and in more equitable methods of social distribution of the fruits of technical progress, urbanization can be regarded as a prerequisite of these transformations -the cities being the setting for economic diversification and social mobility- and at the same time a result of them insofar as these changes help to accelerate the spatial displacement of the population and make large urban areas viable.

It will be seen from the above that the analysis of urbanization, of its causes and consequences, should be carried out in theoretical and technical terms, paying attention to the specific interactions between this process and the socioeconomic context in which this takes place historically. Within this framework it must be emphasized that the identification of the effects of urbanization in terms, for example, of the generalized diffusion of environmental deterioration and dearth of social services does not in itself lead to the exploration of solutions. These must be included in the strategies for demographic settlement formulated as components of more global conceptions of development planning.



From this viewpoint the process of urbanization is one of the most significant dimensions of the theme of human settlements. Equally, the various changes represented by this process seem indissolubly linked with the modes adopted by social change and development.

## I. HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EXPRESSIONS

In recent decades urbanization -understood as a complex process of a demographic, economic, social and cultural type, and as a trend towards the structuring of settlement systems predominantly urban- has been one of the most significant development processes of the countries of the region. The tempo attained by this process supports the prediction that urban settlement will, in the short run, be the prevailing form of establishment in Latin America. Its evolution implies at least two concomitant expressions: one of a demo-spatial nature and the other of a socioeconomic type, which do not necessarily occur simultaneously. One is the progressive concentration of population in urban areas, which results in the growth and physical modification of the cities, and the other is the gradual transformation of an eminently rural economy into one essentially industrial.

### 1. Demo-spatial expressions of urbanization

Latin America stands out among the less developed regions both for its relatively high proportion of urban population and for the rate of growth of this proportion. From the demo-spatial standpoint this degree of urbanization has been reached by virtue of major internal migratory movements and the rapid multiplication of the population, all of which has contributed to the emergence of a large number of cities, some of them of considerable size. To give an idea of the magnitude of this process some figures indicating the main variables involved are briefly considered below.

During the quarter-century between 1950 and 1975 Latin America was the region with the most rapid demographic growth in the world. Whereas the total world population increased by 60% during this period, that of Latin America doubled. Undoubtedly this rate of population growth was the result of the difference between a relatively high birth-rate and a considerably reduced death-rate. In fact, the overall birth-rate of the region was 5.1 in the period 1970-1975, a figure which is twice that of the developed regions, although appreciably less than that of Africa and the South of Asia; moreover, life expectancy at birth in Latin America, for both sexes, reached 60.5 years in the same period, a figure which is nearer to that of the more developed than the less developed regions.<sup>2/</sup>

As a result of the rapid multiplication of its population, the density of Latin America doubled, rising from 8 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1950 to 16 in 1975. Nonetheless, the distribution of the population in the regional space shows marked differences between countries; the national densities fluctuated, in 1975, between less than 4 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and 568. Despite these differences, most of the countries had densities that did not exceed 30 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, a figure indicative of a relatively low occupation of

space, at least in comparison with the figures recorded in other regions of the world.<sup>3/</sup> The variations in demographic density are even more striking within the countries; it often happens that areas of small size have a high concentration of population, forming nuclei of agglomeration surrounded by vast territories clearly underpopulated. Even though this situation underwent some modifications between 1950 and 1975, there has been a general trend towards a relative increase in the processes of concentration and a persistence of underpopulated areas.

The trend towards concentration of the regional population becomes manifest when the evolution in the degree of urbanization is considered. Whereas in 1950 the urban inhabitants of Latin America (around 40 million people) represented a quarter of the total population, in 1975 about half the Latin American population (some 142 million) lived in localities of 20 000 or more inhabitants.<sup>4/</sup> Practically two thirds of the total growth of the regional population in the period 1950-1975 was absorbed by the settlements of that size. These figures illustrate the intensity attained by urbanization in Latin America as a direct result of the different patterns of total growth of the urban and rural populations.

In all the countries of Latin America the urban population increased, during the period 1950-1975, much more rapidly than the rural population. In the region as a whole the urban growth rate was more than three times higher than the rural. What is more, in thirteen countries the annual growth rate of the urban population exceeded 5%, which implies the doubling of the number of urban inhabitants in less than 15 years. Only in three countries -Argentina, Uruguay and Cuba- were there annual urban growth rates of around 3% or less, in spite of which the difference between these and the rural growth rates indicates a clearly expansive rate of urbanization.<sup>5/</sup>

Two factors coincide, simultaneously and immediately, in explaining the rapid urban growth: a relatively high natural growth in the total population -resulting from the difference between a high though decreasing birth-rate and a continually declining death-rate- and the net transfer of population from rural to urban areas. This latter factor in its turn comprises two sets of elements: the existence of migratory movements between the rural and urban areas and the reclassification of the rural population, whether because of the physical expansion of the cities, which absorb localities previously rural, or because of the growth of some of the latter, which are classified as urban when they exceed a certain level of size. On the basis of indirect estimates it can be affirmed that, on average for Latin America, the contribution of natural growth probably represents around half the total urban increase, while the net transfer of rural population, which accounts for the rest, would appear to be formed mainly by the migration of persons of rural origin. Apparently, according to studies conducted recently by the United Nations, the relative contribution of the transfer of rural population tends to rise in the countries which show lower rates of total population growth.<sup>6/</sup> As seems obvious, the highest rates of urban growth are observed in the countries in which the growth rates of the total population are higher; nonetheless, the factor which really contributes to the rise in the degree of urbanization is the net transfer of rural population, the relative weight of which appears to be greater in the countries with lower rates of total population growth.

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Although the growth of the urban areas is much higher than that of the rural, which is a clear sign both of the tempo of Latin American urbanization and of the trends towards concentration, the distribution of the inhabitants according to the size of the localities reveals a clearer image of the concentration profile. In 1950 a fifth of the total population in only four countries, those with the highest degree of urbanization - Argentina, Cuba, Chile and Uruguay - lived in cities of 100 thousand or more inhabitants; in 1975, by contrast, there were 14 countries in which this proportion was exceeded. What is more, the great metropolitan areas of a million or more inhabitants concentrated 9% of the Latin American population in 1950 and over 22% in 1975; in this latter year considerably more than a third of the urban inhabitants of the region lived in these huge metropolitan areas.<sup>7/</sup> The growth of these areas has been heightened by migrations from the rest of the national urban systems.

The figures presented show clearly the intensity attained by regional urbanization and the growing preponderance of the larger cities. If these trends persist it is quite probable that, towards the year 2000, more than two thirds of the population of Latin America will be living in some 2 000 localities of 20 000 or more inhabitants, and that more than half of this urban population will be found in some 46 great metropolitan areas. Even in the countries which today evince a relatively low level of urbanization it is foreseeable that the urban inhabitants will be more numerous than the rural towards the end of the twentieth century.<sup>8/</sup>

As regards human settlements of a rural type, some features of a quantitative type should be mentioned. The adoption of the figure of 20 000 inhabitants as a criterion of delimitation between urban and rural localities does not imply that the latter represent a sort of undifferentiated residue. At least for analytical purposes, two large categories of rural settlements can be distinguished, one which defines residence of a transitional nature, denominated urban-rural, and the other which is fully rural; the limit between the two categories can be fixed at 2 000 inhabitants.

It has been estimated that about 15 or 20% of the total population of Latin America lived in localities which, in 1975, had between 2 000 and 19 999 inhabitants. Between 1950 and 1970 approximately 430 localities or towns of that size were incorporated into the urban systems of the countries for the reason that their populations were reclassified on exceeding 20 000 inhabitants, which was the result of a growth that reflects the contribution of natural growth and also the transfer of population from other localities.<sup>9/</sup> Despite the relative magnitude of this reclassification, it is probable that the rural townships will continue to retain an appreciable proportion of the total population in the countries with a lesser degree of urbanization.

The group of localities with fewer than 2 000 inhabitants is certainly the most numerous in relation to the number of settlements it comprises. The total growth of its population has, however, diminished, basically because of migration and physical absorption, or annexation, by the urban nuclei. Around

1975 almost a third of the Latin American population lived in this type of eminently rural locality. It is useful, however, to distinguish two groups within this type. The first is composed of small centres which have between 500 and 1 999 inhabitants, in which some forms of services and transport and communications are set up to meet the demands of the surrounding population, while at the same time they constitute points of storage and marketing on a small scale. These small centres comprise a fifth of the genuinely rural population of Latin America. A second group, which accounts for the greater part of the eminently rural population, consists of small hamlets, groups of houses and isolated dwellings. Of course, the degree of dispersion of this population varies according to its proximity to larger localities or routes of communication; the type of settlement is in general precarious in terms of the satisfaction of basic needs, and has not received sufficient study.

Although the presentation of the demographic indicators of the spatial distribution of the population would require a more thorough analysis which would help to identify the variety of situations existing in Latin America, the elements mentioned show that urbanization has been acquiring a pre-eminent position in the region. This pre-eminence will become even more evident in the next two decades. The projections available indicate that in the remaining years of this century significant changes will occur in the patterns of human settlement. The national urban systems will become denser, with a growing preponderance of cities of 100 000 or more inhabitants (in some 600 of these cities considerably more than half the total regional population is likely to be concentrated) with emphasis on the huge agglomerations and conurbations. Moreover, the smaller urban nuclei will increase in number with the reclassification of the mixed urban-rural communities and it is probable that in the vast areas which are still sparsely populated the dispersed forms of settlement will continue to exist.

## 2. Socioeconomic expressions of urbanization

As mentioned in preceding sections, the immediate explanation of urbanization, from a demographic standpoint, lies in the involvement of two global factors, the natural growth of the urban population and the net rural-urban transfer of population. Both factors are the result of a complex variety of conditions which form part of the economic and social structures prevailing in the region. The precise identification of the elements involved and of the causal mechanisms represents a highly complex task, most of which has still to be done. Here we shall only make a brief reference to very general indications concerning changes that have occurred and that can be interpreted, in effect, as situations that accompany Latin American urbanization. Like any presentation of a global character, what follows will involve some simplification, which does not mean that we are overlooking the high degree of heterogeneity existing in the region in these matters.

Although during recent decades there have been signs of change in the historic characteristics of the agrarian structures in the region, it can be sustained that these, many of which still persist, constitute antecedents of the accelerated growth of urbanization. Among the more generalized features of these structures there is the concentration of ownership of agricultural land

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which has frequently gone hand-in-hand with a high degree of subdivision of the land in the areas of the minifundium. These forms of tenure of this basic resource are associated with a relatively slight technological development and with predominantly dependent labour relations, which, in the presence of an abundant supply of manpower, result in very meagre monetary incomes for the greater part of the agricultural population. The forms of organization of the rural economy related to these structures were in the past compatible with a relatively low rate of natural growth, resulting from the persistence of very high mortality rates which tended to neutralize the effects of high birth-rates. Towards the 1930s the mortality rates began to decline at an increasing rate and, as the birth-rates remained relatively high for a prolonged period, the rural areas witnessed a marked increase in population. Given that the lack of dynamism in the prevailing rural productive system resulted in a weak capacity for labour absorption, the demographic increase in the rural areas led to the rise of a relatively surplus population. This produced expulsive pressures which took the form of increased migration to the urban areas.

More or less simultaneously, the great world depression of the 1930s and the interventions of the international market, motivated, later, by the Second World War, created conditions favourable for the substitution of some manufactured goods of habitual consumption. The currents of public and private investment were then channelled towards the establishment of industries which produced for the satisfaction of domestic demand. Since the larger cities, in addition to offering a series of comparative advantages, guaranteed a greater access to the domestic market, the decisions on location obviously favoured these urban nuclei. The concentration of industrial activities and public and private services in these cities contributed, as indicated above, to the gradual emergence of external economies of agglomerations. In its turn, the improvement of the financial mechanisms led to an intensification of capital accumulation through net transfers coming from the rest of the national territories. Under such conditions, the cities offered apparent possibilities of diversified employment and monetary incomes which undoubtedly represented a counterpoise to the restrictions found in the rural labour market.

The reception of continuous immigrations of people seeking to improve their living conditions, the increasing concentration of industries and services and the centralization of the public and private administrative agents have given rise to a considerable expansion of the urban areas, especially the larger ones. Thus, the national urban systems are headed by a few principal cities which, in relation to the rest of the cities, have a relatively high primacy in the sense that their physical demographic and economic magnitudes are several times greater than those of the cities which follow them in the hierarchy of the settlements. The concentrating and centralizing effects reproduce themselves in their turn, insofar as the economies of agglomerations generated in the large cities create conditions which favour a higher return on investments. Moreover, the public sector tends to concentrate resources in these cities to meet the costs of the elements of infrastructure and the services required to ensure its functioning.<sup>10/</sup>

As mentioned above, the agrarian structures of the Latin American countries have undergone changes in the last decades the effects of which would seem to have raised the expulsive pressures on the population. Thus in certain areas technological innovations have been introduced as a means of raising the profitability of capital and obviating the effects of the agrarian reforms, and these innovations have given rise to a progressive diminution in labour-intensive enterprises and to an increase in the seasonality of labour demand. Furthermore, many of the agrarian reform schemes seem to have resulted in a reduction of labour opportunities, whether because they were aimed at a primarily individual or family assignment of land or because they were introduced in the midst of a process of peasant mobilization to which the landowners responded by adopting contractual mechanisms which enabled them to prevent unionization.<sup>11/</sup> In one way or another, many of these changes have had the net effect of tending to restrict the supply of jobs in the agricultural and livestock sector, an effect which has not been sufficiently countered by plans and programmes of settlement in new areas. Consequently, in seeing their expectations of employment reduced, large groups of population have moved into the urban areas. Additionally, the extension of educational services and the teaching of subjects which arouse values and motivations that cannot be satisfied in the rural environment, strengthen the migratory pressures. Finally, within this general perspective, there is the increase in the seasonality of the demand for agricultural labour, owing to the entrepreneurial nature of the enterprises that use "modern" technology, which has fostered temporary migrations, usually involving the setting up of homes in small towns and cities.

At the same time, the industrial process, stimulated by policies of a protectionist type, has developed into a productive structure directed mainly towards the generation of consumer goods which require, to some extent, imported raw materials and technological processes. In its turn, the restrictions on domestic demand, occasioned by a generally regressive income distribution, has led to the formation of quasimonopolistic supply situations. Hence, manufacturing firms have been progressively losing their national character to be incorporated as branches or subsidiary agencies of huge transnational enterprises, which have in many cases displaced the small producers. A significant effect of these changes is that the growing use of capital-intensive technologies has caused restrictions in the labour demand within the urban area; this partly explains the fact that the relative surplus of economically active population in the cities has been taking up service functions of the most varied kind.

Another of the effects has been the rise in economic concentration in the large cities which in this way absorb human and physical resources from the rest of the national territory. Nevertheless, since many of the industries depend on large volumes of imports and since their products are aimed at satisfying the demand established in these same cities, they do not help to intensify the use of local natural resources, so that their dynamizing effect is slight and their capacity to absorb non-urban labour is considerably reduced.

In view of the conditions briefly described, it is not surprising to find that the migrants of rural origin, or coming from small towns, tend on the whole, at least for an initial period, to join the ranks of the lowest urban strata. These migrants are distinguished by their underemployment, small and irregular income, lack of adequate formal education and a marked insecurity in their material conditions.<sup>12/</sup> Hence the continuous arrival of migrants contributes to the persistence and, in very many cases, to the worsening of the economic and social inequalities of the cities, especially the largest, as well as to the impairment of the quality of the environment.

The migrants in themselves by no means constitute a homogeneous or specific social stratum; they are distributed among the different levels in the cities and are also subject to processes of mobility. The contention is that to a large extent these migrants, during their first stages of urban residence, become part of the most disadvantaged groups existing in the cities. Moreover, the urban social structures exhibit inequalities which reveal, perhaps more clearly, the general lack of equity existing in the national societies. Depending on the degree of the inequalities, which is probably connected with the historical process of urbanization in each country, different configurations can be identified in the middle strata. These have a relative significance which depends in some measure on the expansion attained by the educational services, the functioning of the labour market for professionals and technicians and the degree of openness - or democratization - of the systems of decision. In some countries these middle strata are in process of emergence; in others they constitute a relatively large social sector, supported on solid bases and clearly differentiated as regards their aspirations and collective behaviour patterns.

The foregoing observations are highly generalized and simplify the complex and diversified sociocultural reality of the cities. Individuals and groups which, from the standpoint of their insertion in the productive structure, might be regarded as "belonging" to certain of the strata mentioned, evince types of behaviour which, from the point of view of normal conduct, would be expected in other social sectors. Finally, the so-called lower strata comprise very dissimilar groups, ranging from the industrial wage-earning manual worker to the "marginal" settler who devises non-conventional subsistence strategies.

Owing chiefly to the relative importance of the economic activities and that take place in them, the metropolitan areas are distinguished by the fact that the personal incomes earned by the population are higher than the national averages. Likewise, the differences in their distribution among strata are usually less marked than in the rest of the country. Obviously, these comparisons are limited by a series of conditions. These include the fact that, whereas in the large cities relations of a monetary type have become universal, in the other human settlements simple forms of barter still exist which do not necessarily involve the use of money. Another element to be borne in mind is that the relative cost of daily living is usually higher in an urban area, where access to food and housing is affected by formal modes of marketing. Besides,



residence in the city implies other costs for services and transport which are generally absent, or at least less intense, in rural areas. Nor must it be forgotten that in urban localities there are multiple marketing and credit mechanisms which, in the last instance, incentivate greater consumption. These conditions explain why, despite their higher incomes, urban inhabitants tend to have a relatively low propensity to save.

The patterns of social stratification briefly summarized here become all the more evident when the forms of social organization of urban space are considered. One can often observe situations of segregation or strikingly different uses of this space in virtue of the different styles of ownership and property management conditioned by the social power structures in being. Thus, the institutional marketing systems for urban land contribute to the evolution of forms of speculation which are prejudicial to the lower-income strata. Moreover, the costs involved in the provision of certain services and physical benefits are usually paid by the State, without their being shared, at least proportionally, by the private agents who benefit from the public measure. This is equivalent to a type of subsidy which is paid for by the whole community and whose benefits, which result in a differential valuation of the urban space, are enjoyed by a minority. Usually the main source of finance for these costs consists in indirect taxes -generally easier to administer than direct taxes- which obviously have regressive effects on income distribution. As a result of these measures the social inequalities tend to increase, giving rise, within the urban framework, to homogeneous socio-spatial subsystems, distinct from one another. The consequence of this phenomenon is a growing qualitative gap in the urban environment.

It is often claimed that the differences produced by the lack of satisfaction of the basic needs of the population constitute a source of environmental deterioration, or what has been referred to as the "contamination of poverty". The group of agents that depress the quality of life in the urban area represents, in effect, forms of external diseconomies of agglomeration which, in the case of the most disadvantaged social groups, appear as structural maladjustments between the full development of individual capacities and potentialities and the conditions imposed by the medium. The high values of land and building lead to a gradual diminution of the space available per person. The replacement of the residential function by others of a commercial type in the central areas and along the main axes of circulation causes a progressive displacement of the various social strata towards peripheral locations. In increasing proportion the population has to be housed in buildings constructed or subsidized by the public sector in distant places, which creates increasing costs of transport and pressures to invest in public works, transport and service networks. Nonetheless, as State action can satisfy only a part of the residential and infrastructural needs of those who have no access to the formal land and construction market, there is an increase in the areas of precarious settlement characterized by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and manifold problems. Meanwhile, the higher-income strata adopt "housing solutions" which, in practice, constitute urban complexes consisting of luxurious apartment blocks or spacious family mansions. Such

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constructions require the expansion of physical endowments which, at least in relative terms, are only minimally used; normally these endowments are financed by the public sector and their costs are not directly defrayed by the users but by the population as a whole.

The physical expansion of the large cities is accompanied by various forms of suburbanization. The upper classes move continually in search of pleasanter surroundings and areas fully endowed with services and infrastructure. The lower-income strata settle on vacant lots which are awaiting "urban land appreciation" and where they build temporary shacks lacking in services. Further, the regulation of the urban structure in expansion leads to conditions of congestion which cause imbalances between the capacity of the physical systems and the dimensions of the social demands made on them.

To sum up, the social space of Latin American cities, especially of the metropolitan areas, instead of being a single cultural system, consists of a series of differentiated subsystems whose integration depends on mechanisms of ownership and management. The marked stratification of the city in respect of the settlement areas, the use of physical endowments, the provision of services and the distribution of income -in short, in respect of the manifold dimensions of the quality of life and the environment- creates a heterogeneous context which reveals the inequalities of the social structures of the countries. It is essentially a case of a particular process of human settlement which calls for profound interpretative analyses to enable action strategies to be devised.

### 3. Problems and challenges of urban concentration

Given that Latin American urbanization, which includes concentration in the greater metropolitan areas, has evolved for the most part before industrial development and without there being necessarily a substantive modification of the agrarian productive organization, it has problematical structural features which affect the overall patterns of spatial distribution of the population. These problems, now chronic, include unemployment and underemployment, the pronounced expansion of tertiary activities of low productivity, the meagre and irregular incomes, the insufficient rate of saving and investment, restricted demand and a somewhat limited supply of goods and services. In its turn, as the phase of industrial growth tended to favour those places in which there was already a demand, there has arisen an increasing concentration of production plants and their concomitant services in the larger cities. This concentration, which has continued to expand and reproduce itself, has played an important part in the generation or accentuation of economic differences between the various territorial units of the countries. This has resulted in the formation of urban systems which are characterized by the predominance of several principal cities and a dearth of medium-sized cities with economic structures sufficiently diversified to generate options of localization.

Undoubtedly the above situation would be greatly simplified if one could ignore the historical roots of the styles of occupation of the national spaces,

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profoundly affected by the existence of natural resources that can be sold in the international market. Another influential element, deriving from colonial times, has been the centralization of the processes of political decision. Also to be borne in mind is the heavy external dependence of Latin America, which, with variants, has been reflected in economic, technological, cultural and sociopolitical processes. The consideration of all these elements seems to show that the greater metropolitan areas of the Latin American countries have functioned simultaneously as central nuclei of population distribution and activities within the national spaces and as peripheral nuclei within the system of interchange that controls the international macrospace.

On the basis of the aforesaid characteristics some preliminary assessments can be formulated as to the conditions that might influence the future of Latin American urbanization.<sup>13/</sup> If the development of this region depended on an intensification of agricultural production and a diversification of the industrial structure, in order to be able to substitute imports of intermediate products and even capital goods, it would be to be expected that urbanization would continue its rapid growth, which implies the need to meet new and greater demands for infrastructure. These conditions might possibly compel a reformulation of the spatial organization schemes so as to be able to generate options other than the metropolitan areas through the promotion of external economies of agglomeration in other localities of the national urban systems. Certainly it would be necessary to make major adjustments to the development styles in order to incentivate substantive changes in the patterns of spatial distribution of the population and in the territorial configuration of the human settlements. Such adjustments would imply, in their turn, decisions designed to achieve greater social equity. In the absence of such changes the options for the population would become more and more restricted and there would be a tendency for the concentration in the principal city to intensify or for the pressures on the rural productive structures to become more conflictive. The consolidation of a development style which implies a heavy concentration of incomes, an incentive for financial speculation, a decline in the role of the State as agent of the redistribution of the fruits of economic growth and an economy based in essence on the exploitation of the so-called "comparative advantages" could lead to a deterioration in the material living conditions of the population and to a decrease in the effective possibilities of participation in the processes of social and economic decision-taking.

It has been argued in these notes that the factors determining the deterioration of the urban sector and the quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in the provision of services demanded by the population originate in structural problems pertaining to the functioning of the Latin American societies. The disparity between the rhythm of economic growth and the distribution patterns of the income generated has resulted in a high degree of demographic concentration in the large cities. Here the structural problems of the nation are heightened, apparently because of the size attained by the cities and the lack of equity in the social organization of space. From an essentially technical standpoint it could be contended that when certain levels

of urban size have been passed -in terms of population and surface area- the marginal costs of satisfying basic needs tend to exceed the benefits. Hence new schemes of urban structuring should be devised, founded on a careful cost-benefit analysis, which would deal with different possible forms of settlement. This does not mean, however, that the cause of the deterioration and the deficiencies is the size or speed of growth of the city; these conditions, as has been repeatedly shown, are effects of social change. Hence the technical analysis should reformulate the social content of the terms of cost and benefit whenever the aim is to explore alternatives for the future.

In sum, urbanization confronts the countries of the region with an enormous challenge. The apparently "inevitable" effects of demographic concentration in a few cities -urban deterioration, insufficiency or lack of services, congestion, many forms of contamination- demand a great planning effort not confined to the use of palliatives, which are often very burdensome and far from effective. It is a question of a historic crusade which calls for the analysis and investigation of the interrelations between urbanization and economic and social development, examining the effects created and the defining criteria for the formulation of strategies and the selection of instruments of action.

## II. HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND PUBLIC POLICIES

The trends indicated, relating to the demo-spatial and socioeconomic expressions of urbanization in Latin America, together with the consequences observed, give priority to the task of approaching the proposal of policies concerning human settlement and specifically urban settlement from the broader perspective of its insertion into the processes of social change and development. It is imperative to ascertain the way in which the problems referred to arise and evolve since these affect the quality of life and the environment of the population. Hence the said policies should have a clearly preventive character and lead to the establishment of human settlement structures in accordance with the objectives of economic and social development.

It must be borne in mind that the public policies regarding types of settlement and urban dimensions are only part of the total decisions that affect the structure and functioning of the settlement system of a country at a particular time. In effect, the decisions adopted at the business and family level may have greater incidence than those of the public agents on the shape of the migratory flows and on patterns of settlement and urban structure. These decisions are based, among other considerations, on market conditions, the location of natural resources and the perception of opportunities, usually in the short term. Hence the longer-term overall spatial, economic, social and political effects are not necessarily taken into account. Conversely, the courses of action adopted by the public authority should, at least in theory, be subject to criteria of a general and long-term nature resulting from the application of a model of the total functioning of the social system; likewise, this action should be adjusted to the dictates of a development strategy that would lead to the achievement of global and sectorial goals and objectives. In short, it is a case of two different types of rationale.

It often happens that the efficacy of the decisions taken by private agents -in terms of the speed with which they are executed, their relative irreversibility and the somewhat segmented field of action they encompass- enters into conflict, or at least is not appropriately articulated, with the channels of decision of the public sector. Habitually the lack of communication and integration between the two types of decision-taking agents obstructs the functioning of the national planning system and confronts the governments with de facto situations which leave them with no alternative but to take measures "ex post", which require a continuing effort, often onerous though insufficient, to "solve" the problems caused by private action. The lack of integration derives, in no small measure, from the rigidity and somewhat routine character of the legislation and form of institutionalism in force.

Several of the Latin American countries have formulated, at different times during recent decades, some type of policy on matters closely related to the settlement of the population, urbanization and the structure and functioning of some of the larger urban settlements. These policies, however, have generally been sectorial in character, and, as already stated, have been in essence corrective of situations regarded as problematic. An

/example of

example of these policies is the varied range of programmatic approaches, sometimes endowed with solid technical support, aimed at solving the housing problem of the large cities or at remedying the deficiencies of urban transport and roadways. The spectrum is even wider and embraces programmes of urban and rural community endowment - which were very common in the 1960s and 1970s - and regulations designed to control urban growth and establish norms of urban land use. Mention must also be made of the group of experiments in regional planning which have given rise in some cases to national systems of spatial planning which include criteria for resource allocation.

In some countries policies have also been devised to counter the concentrative trends in the large cities, for which legal instruments have been applied, such as those seeking to forbid the setting up of new industries in certain places or to incentivate, through tax concessions and the habilitation of physical endowments, their establishment in particular regions or cities. In its turn, the agrarian sector has been the object of a series of programmes, such as those of agrarian reform, which, with many variants, have been put into practice in various countries of the region; there have also been plans for colonization and projects for promoting agroindustrial activities.

Despite the fact that in some countries great political importance has been given to the national planning of human settlements and to the protection of the environment, it is still the exception to find the formulation of overall policies of urbanization and urban development integrated into national development strategies.

It would be difficult to attempt an evaluation of the policies adopted, although it appears that the results have generally fallen short of expectations. In effect, the reform of the existing situation is an extremely difficult task, not only because of insufficient knowledge about the determining factors and the variables involved in the field of urbanization and about the spatial distribution of the population in general, but also because of the conditions that regulate the forms of intervention in the socioeconomic and spatial situation. The pressures exerted by the different interest groups, the institutional patterns that control the forms of ownership, the component of inertia implicit in the investments made, the absence of clearly defined development strategies, the seriousness of the massive deficiencies in housing and services and the instability of the political mechanisms are only some of the many elements which generally hamper the adoption of measures that would do more than palliate those problems which reflect situations of a structural nature.

From the above standpoint, it is clear that the policies aimed at human settlement in its broadest sense are concerned with the way in which this process is articulated with the productive, social, political and even ideological structures. The scientific analysis which these policies involve should, therefore, be conducted in conformity with the assumption that the said policies

/constitute norms

constitute norms of public conduct within the context of global strategies of change. Consequently, emphasis must be laid on the importance of the study of the relations between the settlement process and development, as a priority task for the formulation, execution and evaluation of policies that form part of development planning.

This type of study will help to increase and strengthen the scientific base required for the elaboration of policies which, in contrast to the habitual palliatives or corrective measures, are directed to changing the determining factors of population distribution and also to the prevention of certain effects which, in relation to the global development strategies, are considered undesirable.

It will be necessary, in addition, to explore options of action capable of realization given certain conditioning factors imposed by the development styles and by the capacities of execution inherent in the political systems of the region. Under determined conditions it will have to be decided whether, taking into account these styles and executive capacities, it will or will not be possible to adopt certain political policies. Similarly, a follow-up process will be required for the trends of change and the implementation of the policies designed in order to evaluate not only the magnitude of the overall results but also the effectiveness and efficiency of the various instruments and measures that these policies envisage.

#### Notes

1/ United Nations, Patterns of Urban and Rural Population Growth (New York, ST/ESA/SER.A/68, Sales No. E.79.XIII.9, 1980). See also: Tertius Chandler and Gerald Fox, 3000 Years of Urban Growth (New York, Academic Press, 1974), and John V. Grauman, "Orders of magnitude of the world's urban population history", in United Nations Population Bulletin, No. 8, 1976, pp. 16-33.

2/ More detailed recent information can be found in CELADE, Boletín Demográfico, Nos. 27 (January 1981) and 28 (July 1981) and in América Latina: Situación demográfica evaluada en 1980, CELADE, A/168, Santiago, Chile, 1981.

3/ See ECLA, Situación demográfica actual, perspectivas e implicaciones para la planificación del desarrollo en la región, E/CEPAL/CEGAN/Pob.2, Santiago, Chile, 1979.

4/ ECLA/CELADE, Urbanización y asentamientos humanos en América Latina. Situación actual y tendencias futuras, E/CEPAL/CONF.70/L.4, Santiago, Chile, 1979.

5/ Ibid.

6/ United Nations, op.cit. Naturally it would be very important to be able to disaggregate the "transfer" component in order to observe the specific effects of the migratory flows and of the reclassification; it is really a question of different phenomena which call for more detailed analyses to serve as a basis for making population projections and designing policies.

7/ ECLA/CELADE, op.cit.; see also ECLA, Tendencias y proyecciones a largo plazo del desarrollo económico de América Latina, Series Cuadernos de la CEPAL, E/CEPAL/1027/Rev.1, Santiago, Chile, 1977.

8/ United Nations, op.cit.; ECLA, Situación demográfica actual..., op.cit., and CELADE, Boletín Demográfico, No. 28, July 1981.

9/ ECLA/CELADE, op. cit.

10/ Carlos de Mattos, "La movilidad espacial de recursos en los países latinoamericanos", in ILPES/ILDIS, Planificación regional y urbana en América Latina, Ed. Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1978.

11/ A more complete analysis of the relations between the changes in the agrarian structure and the patterns of spatial distribution of the population appears in Raúl Urzúa, "Distribución espacial de la población en la América Latina", in CELADE, Notas de Población, Año VIII, No. 22, pp. 9-48, Santiago, Chile, April 1980.

12/ Miguel Villa, "Consideraciones en torno al proceso de metropolización de América Latina", in CELADE, Notas de Población, Año VIII, No. 24, pp. 57-105, Santiago, Chile, December 1980.

13/ In this connection see, Joop Alberts and Miguel Villa, eds., Redistribución espacial de la población en América Latina, CELADE, Santiago, Chile, 1980.